

to actually go to welfare offices, talk to case-workers, talk to recipients, watch people check in. I spent hours, over a period of years, talking to welfare recipients, asking them, what would it take to make the system work for them, and listening to them tell me all the manifold ways in which welfare discouraged work and independence.

I asked the American people to change course, to restore with all of our people the fundamental bargain that we ought to have opportunity for all in return for responsibility from all our citizens, and to include everyone in America's community.

Today, the bargain is being fulfilled, and our country is working again. We have the longest peacetime expansion in history, nearly 19 million new jobs; the lowest unemployment in a generation; the lowest minority unemployment ever recorded; the highest homeownership in history. From a deficit of \$290 billion, we are moving to a surplus of \$99 billion. And this year alone we will pay \$85 billion on our national debt.

And a big part of this is the decision the American people, through their elected Representatives, made to end welfare as we know it. We raised the minimum wage and passed the earned-income tax credit, which says to working families: If you work full-time, you shouldn't have to raise your children in poverty. We gave 43 waivers to States to launch their own welfare reform efforts when I took office. And then in 1996, as has already been said, a big bipartisan majority, big majorities of both parties and both Houses reached across the divide to pass this welfare reform bill.

We recognize that in addition to requiring able-bodied people to work within a certain period of time, millions of people who had never known anything but dependency, who had never even seen, many of them, their own parents have a job, could not make the transition on their own or easily. So we made sure there was extra support for child care, for transportation, for housing, and we kept the national guarantee—after two vetoes, but we kept the national guarantee of medical care and nutrition for the children of people on welfare and for those moving off.

We also provided new tax incentives to encourage employers to hire people from wel-

fare. Today I am very proud to be able to tell you that all 50 States and the District of Columbia have now met the work requirements for the percentage of people on welfare in their States that have to be in work that we set in 1996. Every single State is in compliance.

The welfare rolls have been cut in half; they're at their lowest level in 32 years. And those who are on welfare today are 4 times as likely to work as when I took office. Now, while some of the credit, doubtless, goes to our booming economy, the Council of Economic Advisers recently did a study for me which found that welfare reform, with its new emphasis on work, has been the single most important factor in reducing the rolls. Three-quarters of the 6.8 million people who have left welfare since I took office did so after welfare reform was signed in 1996. And many who left before did so under the reform efforts adopted by the States.

The credit goes to all of you in this audience and people like you across our country. When we passed the law in '96, I said moving Americans from welfare to work would take the commitment of every element of our society, not just Government but businesses, faith-based organizations, community groups, and private citizens. The Vice President has done a tremendous job of bringing our religious and service organizations together in his coalition to sustain success. And in 1997, as I said, my long-time friend Eli Segal agreed to help to rally the business community and you know the rest. Today, he, Gerry Greenwald, and the other founders have built a partnership that is 12,000 businesses strong.

Members of this welfare to work partnership, businesses both large and small, have given—listen to this—just the members of this partnership have given 410,000 welfare recipients the opportunity to have a job. More than 8 in 10 executives report great success in hiring people off welfare rolls. They're finding these employees are a good investment. They work hard; they stay in their jobs as long or even longer than other employees. And in this era of labor shortages, we must not forget that welfare recipients can be a rich pool of untapped talent, people who are good for the bottom line. I thank

you for recognizing the important role you can play in extending these opportunities to all Americans.

I am proud to say, also under the Vice President's leadership, the Federal Government has done its part. Our goal was to hire 10,000 people by this year from welfare. We have now hired 14,000—in the smallest Federal Government since 1963.

Mr. Mayor, one of the people we hired from welfare is here with us today. Her name is Maria Hernandez. She was on public assistance for more than 3 years; now she's worked as an administrative assistant in our Cook County north census office since January. Thank you, Maria, and thank all the rest of you who are here who reflect the same story. [Applause] Thank you.

Now, before we get on with the program today, I want to tell you that as pleased as we are, we have to do more. And I'd like to mention the things that I believe we have to do to make the most of this economic opportunity for America, to fulfill our moral obligation, to promote the values of work and family to the people still on public assistance and those who teeter going back and forth.

First, we must continue to honor our commitment to welfare reform. There are some in Congress who want to cut the welfare block grants we give to the States and take some of that money back, because the welfare rolls are so low, to finance a big tax cut. I think that would be a mistake, and here's why. Here's why. In every State, there are still people who could move from welfare to work if they had more training, if they had transportation, if they had child care. In every State, there are people who may be working today who might have to leave the work force, for lack of transportation or child care. In every State, there are people who can stay on the job if they get further training.

So I say, let's spend this money to develop the human capacity of our people. It will make the economy stronger, and we will all be better off.

There are other things which need to be done. I have asked the Congress to build on the welfare-to-work program, by helping those who are least prepared to work. My welfare-to-work budget this year contains

extra funds for adult literacy and for education and training for adults. I think that's important.

We must also do more to help low-income fathers honor their responsibility to pay child support to their children. Three years ago, we strengthened our child support enforcement laws. This welfare-to-work budget targets funds to help responsible fathers work and pay child support. I hope Congress will pass it.

Let me say, we also need to make sure that when people move from welfare to work, they understand, if they're in low-income jobs, that their kids are still entitled to Medicaid coverage if their employer doesn't offer health care, and to food stamps, so they'll have adequate nutrition.

The only piece of troubling news in this whole happy scenario is that there has been a drop in use of food stamps among low-income people that is greater than the number of people who have moved into jobs with incomes above that level. No one can find the answer for me, and we've been looking now for weeks and weeks and weeks. But I think, clearly, what has happened is, a lot of people moved from welfare to work; they're delighted to be at work; and they literally don't know that they're still eligible for this assistance. That's what I think is going on. So we have to work on that, and a lot of you here can help.

We also have to strengthen our commitment to child care. For years, mothers on welfare chose not to work because to do so would literally have hurt their children, because it would have cost them more in child care than they could make on the job. In 1996 we added \$4 billion to our child care subsidy, but believe it or not, we have only met one-tenth of the need. So I ask Congress to pass our child care initiative, to provide more child care subsidies and tax credits to needy families and new funds to improve the quality of care. This will also help to sustain welfare reform.

To finish the job, I've asked Congress to double our commitment to transportation assistance to provide 25,000 new welfare-to-work housing vouchers so people can live near their jobs. To finish the job, I have asked Congress to increase the minimum wage, to